

THISDAY

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CSOs wrong perception on Dar's water consumers

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Dar es Salaam

CIVIL society organizations (CSOs) tend to prioritize ideology over interests, treating water consumers primarily as ideologically constructed entities rather than self-interested actors or agents.

According to a recent report by WaterAid on "The rise and fall of private sector participation in Dar es Salaam's water supply", while speaking on behalf of the poor, CSOs do not articulate perceived interests of the poor.

The report stipulates that civil society activists might argue that from poor people's perspectives, the solution lies in greater popular participation and consultation with local communities.

It notes that despite the favour of such processes, they do not consider participation and consultation as alternatives to a well-planned and managed water utility that serves the interests of all citizens.

The study advises that advocacy groups should continue to make the case for pro-poor policies so that the practical issues of providing adequate amounts of clean water to the poor are addressed by policy-makers and implementers.

Campaigning against Private Sector Participation (PSP) does not serve any useful purpose, unless a detailed narration is produced providing an alternative development vision

to what is currently on offer, that better serves the interests of the poor in accessing plentiful, cheap, clean water.

It suggests that rather than trying to mobilize the poor against PSP, CSOs should be doing more to understand the constraints on both the supply and demand sides, and on state capacity to deliver good services.

"It is inconceivable that activist organizations would only attempt to mobilize the public against PSP when there are so many unresolved problems to address, and to organize around," the report explained.

According to the report, CSOs should negotiate for and engage in utility regulation, whether in a public or private utility context, through a formal regulator or external scrutiny of utility performance.

Moreover, what is sorely lacking is a critical mass of attention on, and independent analysis of, the way in which utility management practice relates to performance. CSOs are well placed to articulate citizens' views, to document what works and to promote creative management solutions.

It has been recommended that CSOs can do a great deal to assist utilities with understanding the situation of the un-served and under-served, including mapping poor and under-served areas, water price surveys to find out what poor and vulnerable people are paying for their water, new and better ways of targeting subsidy, proposing and improving exemption systems.